

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE  
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
20508

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Wednesday, July 16, 1997

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**U.S. TRADE REPRESENTATIVE CHARLENE BARSHEFSKY  
WELCOMES REPORT BY U.S. AGRICULTURE GROUPS ON THE  
NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (NAFTA)**

U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky welcomed today a report by U.S. agricultural groups highlighting the North American Free Trade Agreement's (NAFTA) benefits to U.S. agriculture. The coalition of agricultural groups also expressed their support for fast-track negotiating authority for the President.

"The report released yesterday by U.S. agricultural groups confirms that NAFTA has been good for the U.S. and good for our agricultural community. The success of the NAFTA in assuring market access for agriculture is a story about the importance of opening foreign markets," said Barshefsky. "U.S. agricultural exports have grown by 51 percent to Mexico and 17 percent to Canada since NAFTA went in to effect. If recent trends continue, exports could reach \$30 billion per year by 2005 -- up from \$11.6 billion in 1996."

Agricultural exports were at record levels last year, with Canada and Mexico the second and third largest markets for U.S. agricultural goods, accounting for about 10 and 9 percent of U.S. exports, respectively.

"The United States is the world's largest and most competitive exporter of agricultural commodities," said Barshefsky. "We welcome the support of U.S. agricultural groups for the NAFTA and fast-track negotiating authority, which is essential for future success in opening foreign markets on equal terms with our competitors."